

## An Overview of Swedish Child Care

Sweden is a socialistic democracy and like North Carolina is home to over 8 million people. Approximately 726,147 children ages 1 – 12 years, representing 98% of the total population of children, were enrolled in a child care setting (364,045 in preschool, 35,970 in family day-care homes and 326,132 in leisure time care) in 2004 (Swedish National Agency for Education)

Sweden is governed by the Riksdag (Swedish Parliament), using a multi-party system. As of 1991, the Riksdag and government exercise control of early education by setting objectives to be achieved through local child care programs and schools. As of 1998 preschool activities are the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. (Swedish National Agency for Education)

## Role and Types of Child Care

Child care, called **preschool activity** by the Swedes, has been an important component in social and family policy, and as of 1998, in educational policy. The early roots of the child care movement in Sweden (1902), as in the US, were planted to support working families. The care of pre-school and school age children in Sweden has traditionally enabled parents to combine parenthood and work and to contribute to providing children with good conditions in which to grow up.

According to the Ministry of Education, preschool activity is defined as activity for children who do not yet participate in the public education system, which begins at age 6. These activities are provided in three types of settings: preschools, family day care homes and open preschools. A **preschool** provides educational group activity for the children enrolled whose parents are working or studying or if the child is in need of preschool experiences. In **family day-care homes**, a family childminder looks after the children who are enrolled, usually in their own home. Family child care has consistently decreased in number, but still remains a viable care option in rural areas of the country. **Open preschools** provide an opportunity for parents who stay at home with their children to interact in a group, community-based setting for a few hours each day, at no charge.

Preschool activity can be provided by public or private child care entities. Privately managed programs served 12% of the total enrolled preschool population in 2002. Of those enrolled in private programs, parent cooperatives served approximately 40% of the total and an estimated 30% attended a company-run preschool.

## Preschool Activity for Children Ages 1 – 12 years

Preschool activity is available for children starting at age one, and through the age of five. For families with children under the age of 1 year, social benefits such as the provision of a portion of the stay-at-home parent's salary, guaranteed job retention, guaranteed paternal (father) leave and ongoing access to medical care, provide a support network to assure a healthy start for newborns.